



ISAIAH 40:1-24

COMFORT MY PEOPLE ~ PROCLAIM GOOD NEWS ~ THE INFINITE GOD ~ IDOLS CANNOT BE COMPARED TO GOD ~ FEAR NOT

Here is the shift we’ve all been looking forward to...We’ve worked through Judgement and Hope for Jerusalem (1-12), Judgement and Hope for the Nations (13-27) and The Rise and Fall of Jerusalem (28-39). Now it’s time for the restoration of hope for God’s people who have been in exile in Babylon. God begins by speaking comfort to his people and letting them know that there is “good news” coming and it’s centered on the coming Messiah.

Tonight, we’ll be working through the first 24 verses of Isaiah 40. Place yourself in the story. You have been exiled to Babylon for almost 70 years and now God, through the prophet Isaiah, starts to reveal his heart and their future...

English Standard (ESV)	Passion Notes	Passion Translation (TPT)
<p>Isaiah 40:1 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. 2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins.</p>	<p>a 40:1 The Targum reads “You prophets, prophesy comfort, comfort to my people.” See Jer. 31:13, 20; Zeph. 3:14–17; 2 Cor. 1:3.</p> <p>b 40:1 The Hebrew nacham contains deep emotion, compassionate words that give relief and tender consolation to people. Beginning in Isaiah 40, the prophet’s tone and ministry changes from that of chs. 1–39, much like the New Testament brings us an even sweeter, more glorious message than the Old (2 Cor. 3:9). The New Testament begins with John the Baptizer quoting from Isaiah 40, demonstrating that the time has come for the removal of our sins. Compare Isa. 40:3 and Mark 1:3. Isaiah 1–39 speaks of a worldwide desolation; Isaiah 40–66 speaks of a worldwide restoration. The later chapters of this book are described by some scholars as the “New Testament of Isaiah.” The New Testament has twenty-seven books, corresponding to Isaiah’s last twenty-seven chapters. An outline of the remainder of the book could be: The Book of Comfort (40–43), The Book of Cyrus (44–48), The Book of Messiah, the Servant of the Lord (49–57), the Book of Judah, the Victory of the Bride (58–66).</p> <p>c 40:2 Or “Speak to the heart (to revive).”</p> <p>d 40:2 Scripture often contains multiple meanings and applications. Jerusalem here can also mean the church. The church does not replace Jerusalem (Israel), but can be viewed as a “new” Israel (Gal. 6:16). Believers today find their present reality in the New Jerusalem, where God and man have become one. See Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22.</p>	<p>Comfort My People</p> <p>Isaiah 40:1 Your God says to you: “Comfort, comfort my people a with gentle, compassionate words. b 2 Speak tenderly from the heart c to revive those in Jerusalem, d</p>

English Standard (ESV)	Passion Translation (TPT)	Passion Translation (TPT)
<p>³ A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. ⁵ And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”</p> <p>⁶ A voice says, “Cry!” And I said, “What shall I cry?” All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. ⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass. ⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.</p> <p>⁹ Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!” ¹⁰ Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. ¹¹ He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.</p> <p>¹² Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?</p>	<p>e 40:2 For the overcoming believer, the warfare of Romans 7 has ended as we become victorious overcomers who move into Christ’s victory found in Romans 8. Our race begins at the finish line (Rom. 6:5–7).</p> <p>f 40:2 See John 19:30; Rom. 8:1; Col. 2:13–4; 1 Peter 3:18.</p> <p>g 40:2 The Hebrew text is somewhat ambiguous. It could mean double punishment or double blessing. That is, they will receive from the hand of God twice what they have lost. Favor and mercy always triumph over judgment. God will excel in grace toward his people and give us back even more than what our sins took from us. See Ex. 22:4, 7, 9; Job 42:10; Isa. 61:7; Zech. 9:12; Rom. 5.</p> <p>h 40:3 Or “In the wilderness prepare the way for Yahweh’s arrival.” This was a prophecy of John the Baptizer and his ministry of calling people to repentance in preparation for the appearing of the Lord Jesus. Although John came in the spirit of Elijah, he worked no miracles. His prophecy was not to begin a road project but to prepare people’s hearts. Even now the voice of the Spirit is crying out in the wilderness of people’s souls, bringing them to repentance and faith in Christ.</p> <p>i 40:3 See John 14:6.</p> <p>j 40:4 See Isa. 54:17.</p> <p>k 40:5 Or “all flesh” (i.e., Jews and gentiles).</p> <p>l 40:5 Or “All flesh will see it as one.” See Rom. 8:19.</p> <p>m 40:5 See Luke 3:5–6.</p> <p>n 40:8 See Ps. 103:15–16; 119:8–90; James 1:9–11; 1 Peter 1:24–25.</p> <p>o 40:10 Or “His mighty arm rules for him.”</p> <p>p 40:10–11 These verses are somewhat parallel to Eph. 4:11, where we can see the apostle, “his mighty arm” (v. 10), the prophet’s “reward” (v. 10 and Matt. 10:41), the evangelist (salvation’s) “rewards he gives his people” (v. 10), the pastor or “shepherd tending his flock” (v. 11), and the teacher who “gently leads” (into truth, v. 11).</p> <p>q 40:12 Or “Who has weighed the dust of the earth in a basket (third of an ephah)?” The Creator could never be measured by his creation; he is infinitely greater.</p>	<p>and proclaim that their warfare is over. e Her debt of sin is paid for, and she will not be treated as guilty. f Prophecy to her that she has received from the hand of Yahweh twice as many blessings as all her sins.” g ³ A thunderous voice cries out in the wilderness: h “Prepare the way i for Yahweh’s arrival! Make a highway straight through the desert for our God! ⁴ Every valley will be raised up, j every mountain brought low. The rugged terrain will become level ground and the rough places a plain. ⁵ Then Yahweh’s radiant glory will be unveiled, and all humanity k will experience it together. l Believe it, for Yahweh has spoken his decree!” m</p> <p>⁶ A voice says, “Cry out!” And I ask, “What should I say?” “All people are as frail as grass, and their elegance is like a wilting wildflower. ⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of Yahweh blows upon it; the people are just like grass! ⁸ But even though grass withers and the flower fades, the word of our God stands strong forever!” n</p> <p>Proclaim Good News</p> <p>⁹ Go up on a high mountain, you joyful messengers of Zion, and lift up your voices with power. You who proclaim joyous news to Jerusalem, shout it out and don’t be afraid. Say to the cities of Judah, “Here is your God!” ¹⁰ Look! Here comes Lord Yahweh as a victorious warrior; he triumphs with his awesome power. o Watch as he brings with him his reward and the spoils of victory to give to his people. ¹¹ He will care for you as a shepherd tends his flock, gathering the weak lambs and taking them in his arms. He carries them close to his heart and gently leads those that have young. p</p> <p>The Infinite God</p> <p>¹² Who has measured the waters of the sea in the hollow of his hand and used his hand-width to mark off the heavens? Who knows the exact weight of all the dust of the earth q and has weighed all the mountains and hills on his scale?</p>

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<p>¹³ Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD, or what man shows him his counsel? ¹⁴ Whom did he consult, and who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding? ¹⁵ Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales; behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust. ¹⁶ Lebanon would not suffice for fuel, nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering. ¹⁷ All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.</p> <p>¹⁸ To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him? ¹⁹ An idol! A craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and casts for it silver chains. ²⁰ He who is too impoverished for an offering chooses wood that will not rot; he seeks out a skillful craftsman to set up an idol that will not move.</p> <p>²¹ Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? ²² It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; ²³ who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.</p> <p>²⁴ Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble.</p>	<p>r 40:13 See Eph. 1:17.</p> <p>s 40:13 See Rom. 11:34; 1 Cor. 2:16.</p> <p>t 40:14 Or “Who teaches him the right way to do things?” or “Who gives him insight to make right decisions?”</p> <p>u 40:14 That is, who is capable enough to show God how to skillfully design his plan or give him the wisdom needed to carry it out? He is too wise to make a mistake. These verses show us God’s heart of love (v. 11), God’s hand of power (v. 12), and God’s mind of wisdom (vv. 13–14).</p> <p>v 40:15 The Hebrew word used for “drop” is not a drop of water but a myrrh drop. Myrrh was harvested by piercing a tree and collecting drops of sap in a bucket. Nations are more than a drop of water but like myrrh dropping into a bucket.</p> <p>w 40:16 Lebanon was known for its lumber and forests.</p> <p>x 40:17 Or “from nothing but emptiness (as though they didn’t exist).”</p> <p>y 40:18 This is the Hebrew word ‘el, “the mighty God.”</p> <p>40:19 Or “melts (pours out).”</p> <p>aa 40:19 The Hebrew clause is uncertain.</p> <p>ab 40:20 The Hebrew clause is uncertain.</p> <p>ac 40:20 Adam and Eve chose the Tree of Good and Evil. See also Jer. 10:3–4.</p> <p>ad 40:21 Or “Do you not know? Do you not hear?” These two questions (imperfect tense) are best seen as invitations rather than a surprise over their ignorance. See Young, Book of Isaiah, vol. 3, 40–66.</p> <p>ae 40:21 See Ps. 24:2.</p> <p>af 40:22 See Ex. 25:8.</p>	<p>¹³ Who fully understands the Spirit of Yahweh r or is wise enough to counsel him? s ¹⁴ Whom does he consult to be enlightened? Who teaches him the ways of justice? t Who imparts knowledge to him or shows him the true path of wisdom? u ¹⁵ Even the nations are to him like a drop v in a bucket, regarded as nothing more than dust on a scale. He picks up the islands like fine grains of sand. ¹⁶ All of Lebanon’s trees w are not enough firewood for him, nor are all its animals enough for a burnt offering. ¹⁷ The nations are nothing in his eyes; he regards them as absolutely nothing. x</p> <p>Idols Cannot Be Compared to God</p> <p>¹⁸ Who even comes close to being compared to God? y How could you ever compare God to an idol? ¹⁹ A craftsman forms z an idol-god, then a goldsmith overlays it with gold and forges its silver chains. aa ²⁰ The one who is poor and cannot afford silver or gold ab chooses a tree ac that will not rot, then seeks a skilled workman to make an idol that will not topple.</p> <p>Fear Not</p> <p>²¹ Don’t you realize that God is the Creator? Don’t you hear the truth? ad Haven’t you been told this from the beginning? Haven’t you understood this since he laid a firm foundation for the earth? ae ²² He sits enthroned high above the circle of the earth; to him the people of earth are like grasshoppers! He stretches out the heavens like a curtain, spreading it open like a tent to live in. af ²³ He reduces rulers to nothing and makes the elite of the earth as nothing at all.</p> <p>²⁴ They barely get planted and barely take root in their position of power when the Lord blows on them and they wither away, carried off like straw in the stormy wind.</p>

Bible Knowledge Commentary

JOHN A. MARTIN

- THE MAJESTY OF GOD (CHAP 40)

- **Words of comfort: Deliverance is coming** (40:1-11)

- **40:1-2.** These words of comfort in verses 1-11 begin with God saying to His people (through Isaiah) that their time of trial was almost over. The repetition of the word comfort is for emphasis. Looking ahead to the Exile, Isaiah wanted the covenant nation (My people) to be comforted. As stated in the Introduction the words “comfort,” “comforted,” “comforts” occur 13 times in chapters 40-66.

Jerusalem was to be addressed tenderly (lit., “to the heart,” i.e., in gentle, encouraging words; cf. Hosea 2:14) as a mother would speak to her child. The 70-year Captivity was seen as almost over. Hard service translates the Hebrew word for “warfare” and “time of enlistment in war.” Judah’s captivity was like the hardships of war. That time of trial had come because of her sin. But now her sin had been paid for so that God’s blessings could begin. As stated in the Mosaic Covenant, God would bless His people if they lived according to His Word. However, if they disobeyed Him, He would curse them and eventually cast them out of the land of Israel (Deut. 28:15-68, esp. vv. 49-52, 64). Now that cursing was seen as almost accomplished, Israel could have a new start. To receive double for all her sins does not mean to be punished beyond what she deserves but in keeping with what she deserves. The point is that she has now received “full” or “sufficient” punishment for all her sins (cf. “double” in Isa. 51:19; 61:7).

- **40:3-5.** A voice (probably Isaiah’s, different from the voice in v. 6) called out to the people to prepare the way for the LORD (v. 3) and His glory (v. 5). True prophets were “voices,” for their messages were from God. They were calling the nation to get back into a proper relationship with Him. Each Gospel writer applied Isaiah 40:3 to John the Baptist (Matt. 3:1-4; Mark 1:1-4; Luke 1:76-78; John 1:23). John was a desert prophet who prepared the way for Jesus Christ, and who in the wilderness made a highway for Him (cf. Matt. 3:3). However, here in Isaiah the entire nation was in a spiritual wilderness, and each Israelite needed to get ready spiritually for the appearing of the Lord.

Raising the valleys and lowering the mountains refer in hyperbole to workmen leveling or smoothing out the roads on which a dignitary would travel when he came to visit an area. Today an equivalent is, “roll out the red carpet.” In Isaiah’s day he was calling Israel to be “smoothed out” so that the Lord could come to the nation and rule. This was emphasized by all the prophets—ethically the nation must be righteous. Eventually the nation will be “smoothed out” spiritually when the glory of the LORD is revealed (Isa. 40:5). Isaiah was thinking of the millennial kingdom when the Lord will be revealed in His glory, that is, when His unique splendor will be evident everywhere. As Isaiah wrote elsewhere, the Messiah would suffer and would also appear in glory. However, apparently he was not aware of the time interval that would elapse between these two aspects. Though the disciples saw Jesus’ glory (John 1:14), all mankind has not yet seen it, but they will see it in the Millennium. This coming glory is certain for the ... LORD has spoken it (cf. Isa. 1:20; 58:14). The word of the Lord is sure and cannot be broken.

- **40:6-8.** A second voice (cf. v. 3) spoke. This voice, probably God’s, gave the command, probably to Isaiah, to cry out. The voice told him to contrast the difference between people and God. People are temporary and they change. They are like wild grass and flowers that come up in the springtime only to fade and fail when the weather gets hot (cf. Pss. 37:2; 102:11; 103:15-16). By contrast, God never fails for His Word endures forever. This fact would greatly comfort and encourage the people in exile who read these words. Because God’s Word stands, His prophecy that the people would be restored to their land was sure to be fulfilled.
- **40:9-11.** Perhaps the one who was to take good tidings to Jerusalem was someone who was passing on Isaiah’s message. The messenger was to tell loudly to the towns of Judah that God was coming (v. 9) to Jerusalem, restoring His people from exile. Presumably Isaiah envisioned the return from exile as leading immediately into the Millennium, though of course Bible passages written later indicate an extensive time gap between the two events. God

was described first as the Sovereign LORD who is a powerful, conquering King (v. 10). He not only rules in power, but He also brings booty (His reward, i.e., blessings) with Him. Arm suggests strength, a concept Isaiah frequently mentioned (40:10; 51:5 [twice], 9; 52:10; 53:1; 59:1, 16; 60:4; 62:8; 63:5, 12). God was also pictured as a tender Shepherd (cf. Pss. 23:1; 80:1; John 10:11, 14; Heb. 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:4), who carefully carries and leads the weak and helpless members of His flock (cf. Jer. 13:17, 20; Micah 4:8; 5:4; 7:14; Zech. 10:3). These two aspects of the Lord's character are emphasized throughout this second portion of Isaiah's book.

- **Additional words of comfort: God is majestic** (40:12-26)

The various aspects of God's majesty discussed in these verses are repeated often by Isaiah throughout the next eight chapters. For example, God's knowledge and creative power are stressed in 44:24-45:8, and His uniqueness is emphasized in 44:6-23.

- **God's Incomparable Knowledge** (40:12-17).

- **40:12-14.** By five rhetorical questions Isaiah emphasized that God, in creating the universe (v. 12), did not need anyone to assist Him (vv. 13-14). He is such a great Creator that all the waters of the globe were held, as it were, in His hand. Figuratively, He can measure the vast starry universe with the breadth of His hand. Also all the earth's dust could be put in a basket of His; and the mountains and hills, though vast, are so small compared with Him that He, figuratively speaking, could weigh them all on small scales. Though the immensity of Creation is awe-inspiring, no one on earth is God's equal.

In verses 13-14 Isaiah spoke of the infinite knowledge and skill the LORD possesses. No one on earth can claim to have taught the LORD anything. He did not need to consult anyone. Isaiah was probably thinking of the Creation account (Gen. 1) in which God spoke and Creation came into being. In irony God had also pointed out to Job by numerous questions that his knowledge was [Vol. 1, p. 1093] nothing compared with God's (Job 38:2-39:30).

- **40:15-17.** Since God's Creation is so grandiose, the people of the nations are as nothing before Him (like a mere drop of water or dust particles on scales). All the wood and the animals in fertile, wooded Lebanon, north of Israel, would be inadequate for sacrifices that would be significant before the great God. The nations who do not know the Lord are worthless and less than nothing before Him.

- **God's Uniqueness Compared with Idols.**

- **40:18-20.** With irony Isaiah wrote about two idols—one made of metal by a craftsman and then overlaid with gold and decorated with silver ornaments, and another selected by a poor man from wood and fashioned so that it will not fall over. (Other passages denouncing idols are 41:7; 44:9-20; 45:16, 20; 46:1-2, 6-7; Pss. 115:4-7; 135:15-18; Jer. 10:8-16; Hab. 2:19.) Both of these idol-makers used materials God created, and skills that God gave them! God, however, is unlike any idol. He is the Creator of all things including people. God is unique.

- **God's Sovereign Control over the World** (40:21-26).

- **40:21-22.** From His sovereign position in heaven God watches over His created universe. You (used four times in v. 21) refers to people in general. The force of the first question, for example, is "Doesn't everyone know this?" (cf. v. 28) The Lord is like a king sitting enthroned above the circle (g...wj, "horizon," which is circular; cf. Job 26:10; Prov. 8:27) of the earth and over His people who by comparison seem like mere grasshoppers. The heavens (the sky) are pictured as spread out like a tent for Him to live in (cf. Ps. 104:2). Isaiah was not presenting a detailed idea of God's abode. He was merely using imagery that his readers would easily understand.

- **40:23-24.** In controlling history God establishes rulers and removes them (cf. Dan. 2:21). This truth would have been comforting to Isaiah's original readers who were living under the threat of the Assyrian Empire and who heard his prophecy that the Babylonian Empire would take them into captivity.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Fun Fact: None of us in this room tonight have went through 70 years of anything! God had led his people into captivity in Babylon and now he was about to bring them out. What would you say these people needed to hear most from God? What would you want to hear from him had you been in their position?

- Each Gospel writer applied Isaiah 40:3 to John the Baptist (Matt. 3:1-4; Mark 1:1-4; Luke 1:76-78; John 1:23). John must have received this assignment directly from the Lord and realized quickly that what God was calling him to do was literally prophesied in Isaiah 40:3. This was obviously a directive word for John the Baptist. How might his assignment (“In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”) be applied to the contemporary church? What similar message have we been called to embrace and proclaim?
- Take a look at the illustration below. What was the most interesting thing you learned as we worked through verses 1-39 and why?
- There is very little in Isaiah about the time period between Isaiah 39 and 40. Who did God raise up to prophesy during the time of his people’s exile? Do you believe God was prophesying to Isaiah during this time? How do you feel when God is speaking to you for a period of time and then he seems to “go silent” for a season? What do you think God does in the heart of Jesus followers during these times when his voice seems distant? What do we learn from them?

JUDGMENT! ISRAEL'S REBELLION WILL COME AT A COST

ISIAH'S MESSAGE: JERUSALEM

HOPE! THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S COVENANT PROMISES

ISIAH

Suffering-Servant-King Covenant Family of All Nations Hope for a Renewed Creation

1-12 JUDGMENT & HOPE FOR JERUSALEM

1-7 PURGING FIRE

OLD JERUSALEM: REBELLION, IDOLATRY & INJUSTICE

NEW JERUSALEM: JUSTICE & PEACE FOR ALL NATIONS

6 ISIAH'S TEMPLE VISION

NO YOU'RE NOT PURIFIED! NOW GO.

ASSYRIA & BABYLON

7-12 A HOLY SEED?

IMMANUEL: GOD WITH US

A NEW BRANCH FROM THE STUMP OF DAVID'S FAMILY

11 FREEDOM FROM OPPRESSION

EMPOWERED BY GOD'S SPIRIT

13-27 JUDGMENT & HOPE FOR THE NATIONS

13-25 FALL OF BABYLON & ISRAEL'S NEIGHBORS

26-27 A TALE OF TWO CITIES

THE LOFTY CITY

28-39 THE RISE & FALL OF JERUSALEM

28-35 ACCUSATION OF JERUSALEM'S LEADERS

36 HEZEKIAH'S FALL

37-39 BABYLON ATTACKS!

40-48 ANNOUNCEMENT OF HOPE

40 COME, COMFORT MY PEOPLE!

41-47 THE TRIAL

49-55 THE SERVANT FULFILLS GOD'S MISSION

49-51 GOD'S SERVANT

52-55 THE SERVANT'S DEBATE

56-66 THE SERVANTS INHERIT GOD'S KINGDOM

56-60 THE WICKED: FAKE GOD'S JUSTICE

61-66 THE SERVANTS: INHERIT THE NEW CREATION

EXILE!